

Intervention by Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy

Training of micro-regional managers

Eger, Northern Hungary, 28 March 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here with you today and to conclude with Minister Bajnai this training session dedicated to managers of the micro-regional network. I congratulate all of you for assuming this responsibility of managers of Structural Funds that will require from you to fulfil a very large and diverse set of tasks. You will start your job by assuring a successful closure of programmes for 2004-2008 and you will have to launch the implementation of the new programmes. This represents for all of you new challenges and opportunities as you will contribute, with your work in these micro-regions, small pieces of Europe, to make more Europe. It is certainly a very responsible job, and you will have to make the right step in the right direction.

It has been a brilliant idea from the Hungarian Government to set up this network of regional managers and experts. This will certainly promote the absorption of EU and local regional development funds, it will enhance the cooperation between

micro-regions and accelerate the catching up of disadvantaged micro-regions.

As you know, the negotiations of the operational programmes have been completed, the programmes are approved. However, the most important and challenging part of the work is still ahead: the programmes need to be implemented. You will have to work hard to prepare and implement thousands of projects that can contribute to the objectives and results defined in the programmes. Designing and implementing concrete projects is the most real challenge. However the operational programmes have a meaning only if they lead up to the expected results by the implementation of concrete projects.

You play a substantial role in the complex task of fostering the endogenous development of local communities and the solidarity between rural and urban areas. Your job can be defined as a role of engineers of development. You are the key players in providing support to potential beneficiaries, in identifying and preparing their projects. During your daily work you must keep in mind that you are promoting not only individual projects but you are implementing a policy which aims at combining solidarity and growth.

The promotion of endogenous development is a complex process. It requires many factors to come together: human resources

development, support for entrepreneurship, communication and telecommunication infrastructures, services both addressed to the citizens and to the enterprises. It requires taking into account the objective of sustainable growth, especially an efficient management of energy resources. It implies promoting cooperation among SMEs and innovation and know-how transfer in technology, organization and marketing. Creating the conditions for an endogenous development in scarcely populated areas is particularly difficult. Certainly the new telecommunication technologies can facilitate networking and reduce the importance of agglomeration economies. Integrating agricultural and rural activities into other economic activities such as tourism, services and industry can be achieved. But it requires all your efforts and, in some cases, you have to look for a coordinated intervention of the regional and rural funds that allow for important synergies.

I have always repeated in all my speeches three words: Subsidiarity, governance and partnership. Subsidiarity implies that decisions have to be taken at local level, where local needs, require the involvement of all the relevant actors. Governance lies in appropriate and effective decision mechanisms both in the planning and in the implementation phases. You will have to find the meaning of these three words in your territory.

There is also a challenge important for everybody, training. Firstly training addressed to you. You need both general and technical

skills. Your professional profile is complex. You know this of course much better than me. This seminar is part of this training and I am certain that it has been very useful. Secondly, we also have to plan training addressed to the project promoters, to the beneficiaries. This is an important and essential part of the integrated approach. As you know the Regional Fund allows the inclusion of training activities strictly linked to its operations.

Information is another key issue: information of the potential beneficiaries, information of the citizens. A communication plan has to be established for the programmes and we attribute the utmost importance to it. Structural Funds aim at improving the lives of our fellow citizens, promoting social and economic developments. We have to work all together not only for achieving these goals but also for communicating the results. Experience shows that good information, transparency leads to better quality of projects.

Finally decentralising the implementation and the multiplication of the beneficiaries on the ground require diffusing at local level and to a very large set of actors the principles of sound financial management that have to be followed for the implementation of Structural Funds. Transparency in the selection of the projects and in public procurement is essential such as a concern of the European taxpayers, of their political representatives, of the European Commission and of the Hungarian Government. We greatly appreciate the efforts done in this direction. They are

necessary if we wish that this policy remains one of the pillars of European construction.

Let me conclude by stressing again the need for your action as development promoters, engineers and very often policy advisors. We know the difficulty of your task and we strongly want to create all the conditions for your success that will lead to the success of European Regional policy. I would also like to underline your role of ambassadors of our policy on the ground; you are the face of EU Cohesion and Regional Policy in your territories. It is a challenge and a responsibility, but also an honour!

Thank you for deciding to apply for this job. I am delighted to have had this opportunity to meet you. I wish you good luck in your work.